

Wilmington Raccoon Positive for Rabies; Public Health Warns Residents of Chalfonte Area

DOVER – Delaware's Division of Public Health (DPH) is warning residents of the Chalfonte community and surrounding areas in Wilmington who may have come into contact with a raccoon that the DPH Lab found to be rabid on Thursday, April 13, 2017. The raccoon was picked up after getting into a fight with pet dogs in the area and was euthanized.

Anyone who thinks they might have been bitten, scratched or come in contact with a raccoon should immediately contact their health care provider or call the DPH Rabies Program at 302-744-4995. An epidemiologist is available 24/7. Also anyone who thinks their pet may have been bitten by this raccoon should call their private veterinarian or the Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA) at 302-698-4630.

Residents should take precautions against rabies by:

- Avoiding wild and feral animals, regardless of whether or not the animal seems "friendly." Not all rabid animals exhibit the classic signs of the rabies illness, such as aggression, depression, or other abnormal behavior.
- Ensuring their pets are up-to-date with rabies shots.
- Keeping pets indoors or, while outside, supervising them on a leash.

Warm spring and summer temperatures lead to more outdoor activities, which increase possible exposure to rabies through contact with animals such as bats, raccoons, skunks and foxes.

Since January 2017, DPH has performed rabies tests on 24 animals, four of which were confirmed to be rabid, including this raccoon, one other raccoon, one cat, and one dog. This is the second 2017 lab-confirmed case of rabies announced by DPH. DPH only announces those rabies cases in which it is possible the animal had unknown contacts. The first occurred in the Bridgeville area earlier this month.

“As the weather gets warmer, people and their pets may be spending more time outside,” said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. “It is important for people to remember never to approach unfamiliar animals and to keep pets indoors or supervised on a leash while outside.”

Rabies in humans and animals cannot be cured once symptoms appear. If the animal is of unknown origin, or unavailable to be quarantined or tested, the Division of Public Health recommends that people receive postexposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment, a series of four vaccinations, as a precautionary measure.

Rabies is an infectious disease affecting the nervous system of humans and other mammals. Infection can occur through the bite or scratch of an infected animal or if saliva from such an animal gets into the eyes, nose, mouth or an opening in the skin.

Fortunately, rabies is also almost 100 percent preventable. DPH recommends that members of the public take the necessary steps to stay clear of exposure to rabies. Rabies prevention starts with the animal owner. Vaccination of pets and livestock is a crucial factor in rabies prevention.

- All dogs, cats and ferrets 6 months of age and older are required by Delaware law to be vaccinated against rabies by a licensed veterinarian.
- Consider vaccinating livestock and horses. It is recommended to consult with your private veterinarian if

you have any questions regarding whether your animal(s) should be rabies vaccinated.

- Pet owners can reduce the possibility of pets being exposed to rabies by not letting them roam free.
- Spaying or neutering your pet may reduce the tendency to roam or fight and thus reduce the chance they will be exposed to rabies.
- Do not feed or water your pets outdoors; bowls can attract wild and stray animals.
- Keep your garbage securely covered.
- Do not handle unfamiliar animals, including cats and dogs, even if they appear friendly.

For more information on the DPH rabies program, visit: <http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/dpc/rabies.html> or call 1-866-972-9705 or 302-744-4995. For more information on rabies, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.